

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUE

Mental health issues are widespread among college students, yet many students are not able to access the support they need. Among the United States' 21 million college and university students, at some point in the last year, 3 out of 5 students felt overwhelming anxiety and 1 out of 3 students felt too depressed to function. In 2018, more than 300,000 college students attempted suicide and 1,400 died by suicide. Currently, in the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 15-24, with 6,252 deaths by suicide in 2017.

Sixty percent of first-year college students wish they had received more help with emotional preparation for college, but unfortunately, many of the mental health needs of college students go unaddressed as they make the difficult adjustment to college.

SUMMARY OF THE BILL

The legislation amends the Higher Education Act to promote positive mental health among college students and encourage comprehensive planning to prevent suicide on college campuses.

The Enhancing Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Through Campus Planning Act will help fill the gap in unmet mental health needs of college students by requiring the Department of Education to coordinate with the HHS Secretary to encourage institutions of higher education to develop and implement comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention plans. These comprehensive plans will align with the recommendations of SAMHSA's Suicide Prevention Resource Center strategies, specifically its nine-part Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention. This bill will not impose new requirements on institutions of higher education or impose financial burdens.

While the federal government has taken steps to promote positive mental health and suicide prevention in recent years, gaps in services on college campuses persist because there hasn't been a defined role for the Department of Education. As Congress works to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, it is important that higher education policy aligns with updated federal efforts to address mental health and suicide prevention.

This important legislation will help ensure college students have the services they need to support their mental health and succeed in college.

ENDORSED BY



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